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The
FOLK-LORE
of
HERTFORDSHIRE



A brief list of material
collected and classified

by

W. B. GERISH

of

Bishop's Stortford

*(H.M.)
Hertfordshire folklore*

Price 1/-

BISHOP'S STORTFORD

1911

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1911

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THE FOLK-LORE OF HERTFORDSHIRE.

IT would seem that there exists a very general belief in the paucity in Hertfordshire of what is known as folk-lore—which may be described as that branch of the study of antiquities which embraces everything relating to early observances and customs, to the notions, beliefs, traditions, superstitions and prejudices of the people. In proof that this is by no means the case, this hand-list has been printed which serves to indicate, in the briefest manner, the items which have fallen into the compiler's note-book within the past ten years. He has had few opportunities of gathering material at first hand, but there is little doubt that, given the necessary leisure and the exercise of patience and tact, a goodly harvest of ancient lore might be gathered in the districts remote from the influence of railways, such as the regions north of Buntingford and north-west of Hemel Hempstead.

There are probably too, many sources of information to which the compiler has not had access and this list could doubtless be considerably extended if only those conversant with such matters would impart to him the benefit of their knowledge. He trusts in course of time it may be practicable to print a volume upon the Folk-lore of the County, of which this is but a tentative index, in its entirety, but to do this the co-operation of those interested must be invoked and a committee formed for the purpose of carrying it out.

In the meantime he would gratefully welcome any notes upon the subject which could be utilised in either the Hertfordshire Notes and Queries (*Hertfordshire Mercury*), or West Herts Notes and Queries (*Watford Observer*). These useful columns not only serve to chronicle, among other things, this record of man's beliefs and customs, which would probably otherwise be lost, but they stimulate readers to recall to memory recollections of the past and induces them to impart their knowledge for the general advantage of all.

October, 1911.

CLASSIFICATION.

BELIEFS.

CHARMS.

CUSTOMS.

FOLK SONGS.

GAMES.

GHOSTLY VISIONS.

LEGENDS AND TRADITIONS.

PROVERBS AND SAYINGS.

WITCHCRAFT AND POSSESSION.

THE FOLK - LORE OF HERTFORDSHIRE.

BELIEFS.

BELL-ROPE BREAKING.

If rung after wedding, ill-omen for the couple.

CORN AND DISHONESTY.

Dealers in corn, millers and bakers, always deemed to be dishonest.

DANES-BLOOD.

Plants known by this name, growing in any place, indicative of Danes being slain there.

HARE FORECASTING FIRE.

Hare venturing into town or village said to forecast a fire.

HARES UNLUCKY.

Generally regarded as uncanny, witches taking that guise.

JUDGMENTS ON IMPIETY.

Farmers imprecating the weather either struck dead, incapacitated or crops cease to grow.

MOONWORT'S POWERS.

Plant possesses mystic powers in relation to iron, such as horseshoes, locks, &c.

MURDERERS DISCOVERED.

Murdered persons' blood said to flow when touched by the guilty.

RAIN SIGN.

The music of German bands held to forecast rain.

ROSEMARY'S INDICATION.

Where it flourishes, the wife said to be master.

STONES GROWING.

Pieces of conglomerate, likewise stones in fields, said to grow.

TALISMANIC GOLD PIECE.

Instance of find, proving singularly fortunate to discoverer.

TELLING THE BEES.

The hives must be told of death in owner's family.

THE FOLK-LORE OF HERTFORDSHIRE.

CHARMS.

AGUE CURE. BERKHAMSTED.

Locks of sufferers' hair driven by wedges into tree trunk and violently torn from head, said to afford relief from ague.

KING'S-EVIL CURE. GADDESSEN.

Toad mutilated or killed and dried, said to be a specific.

KING'S-EVIL CURE. OFFLEY.

Youth cured by religious observances.

RIDGE-TILES. HITCHIN.

In shape of horse, on gable ends, believed to protect buildings from evil spirits.

ST. OSYTH'S WELL WATER. BISHOP'S STORTFORD.

Held to be good for sore eyes and useful as constituent of pea soup.

CUSTOMS.

BEATING THE BOUNDS.

Practised at Abbots Langley, Barnet, Bengoe, and other places in the county.

BURIAL OF CHILD.

Incident of Bible, glass and key placed in coffin :—symbolical.

BURIAL OF GIPSY.

Instance of apparel and jewellery burnt after funeral of owner.

DOUGH-NUT DAY.

Small cakes made at Baldock on Shrove Tuesday.

FIG SUNDAY.

Figs eaten at Kimpton and elsewhere in North Herts on Palm Sunday.

GANGING-DAY.

A practice at Bishop's Stortford : probably the May-day observance.

GOODENING.

Widows perambulate Braughing collecting doles on St. Thomas's day.

THE FOLK-LORE OF HERTFORDSHIRE.

HARVEST.

Bowl with lighted candle used at harvest festival at Little Hadham.

HARVEST.

Water thrown on last load of corn at Hitchin to ensure fruitfulness.

HITCHIN MEAD.

Drink made from honey, for which Hitchin was celebrated.

HOCKERILL CLUB.

A jocular institution connected with an inn in Hockerill, Bishop's Stortford.

HOCK-TIDE.

Observance at Hexton accompanied by rough play and feasting and supposed to commemorate Danish defeat.

HOT-CROSS BUNS.

Believed to be connected with the worship of goddess Diana, at Royston.

KEEPING KATTERN.

Festival in honour of St. Katherine, patroness of lace makers, at Wigginton.

LAMMAS LANDS.

Rights of commonage granted in consequence of Alfred's victory over the Danes at Ware.

MAY LORDS AND LADIES.

Observed on the first of May at Baldock by dressing effigies and collecting tribute.

MAY-DAY AT HITCHIN.

Observed by dancers in fantastic garb, singing verses (see Mayers Song).

PANCAKE BELL.

Rung at Hoddesdon on Shrove Tuesday.

POP-LADIES.

Cakes made at St. Albans on December 31st, possibly in ridicule of Romanism.

THE FOLK-LORE OF HERTFORDSHIRE.

ST. ALBAN'S BREAD.

"Peyn de Seynt Albon"—perhaps a delicacy of the mediæval period.

ST. VALENTINE'S DAY.

Children visit houses at Albury, Hadham and elsewhere, singing a refrain and collecting pence.

SOUL-CAKES.

Oat cakes made on All Souls' Day (probably in Herefordshire not Hertfordshire).

SWEARING ON THE HORNS.

Jocular custom at inns in Hoddesdon and Ware, to secure certain fanciful privileges.

WASTE LAND.

Waste land sown with lucerne is held to denote ownership.

FOLK SONGS.

"DAFF-A-DOWN-DILLY," ETC.

Verses sung by children when offering wild daffodils for sale.

"GOOD-MORROW TO YOU, VALENTINE," ETC.

Refrain chanted by children when visiting houses on St. Valentine's day morning, for the purpose of obtaining pence.

"GUY, GUY, STICK IN A PIE," ETC.

Refrain chanted by children while taking an effigy of Guy Fawkes round and asking for coppers.

"OLD MOTHER MASON," ETC.

Refrain sung by children when engaged in skipping.

"REMEMBER US POOR MAYERS ALL," ETC.

Verses sung by men in gay attire on the First of May, when collecting tribute.

"THE MAID OF THE MILL."

Song, the heroine of which was Mary Iredale of Baldock.

THE FOLK-LORE OF
HERTFORDSHIRE.

GAMES.

"ALL IN TOGETHER," ETC.

Skipping rhyme : girls run out at the word "fire."

"BULLS-WARNING."

A game of touch with clasped hands.

"COCK ROBIN IS DEAD AND BURIED HERE," ETC.

One child is "cock robin," another is "apple tree" : after word "knock" all children hop.

"EVERY MORNING AT EIGHT O'CLOCK," ETC.

Skipping rhyme : girl named runs out and another runs in.

HALF-BOWLS OR ROLLY-POLLY.

A species of skittles, played with fifteen pins.

"ROUND AND ROUND THE VILLAGE," ETC.

"Ring" game : girl runs outside and under arched arms, finally choosing lover.

"SALLY GO ROUND THE SUN," ETC.

"Ring" game : girls spin round singing, then reverse.

"SALT, MUSTARD, VINEGAR, PEPPER."

Skipping refrain : girl skips slowly, but at word "pepper" rope is twisted as quickly as possible.

"THERE STANDS A PRETTY GIRL OF MINE."

"Ring" game : child in centre chooses partner, kisses, leaving partner who in turn chooses.

"THERE WAS A JOLLY MILLER," ETC.

Girl stands in centre, others walk in twos arm-in-arm : at last word, the pairs break up and change, giving centre girl, the miller, opportunity to secure partner.

"THREAD MY NEEDLE."

Children form arches with hands and sing four line verse.
[A local variant of "Oranges and Lemons."]

THE FOLK-LORE OF
HERTFORDSHIRE.

GHOSTLY VISIONS.

ASHWELL.

Headless figure in black seen in churchyard.

BARKWAY.

Apparition of former mistress of Sir Peter Saltonstall appeared to him.

BISHOP'S STORTFORD.

Volunteer officer, accidentally shot in grounds of Windhill House, said to have been seen after death.

BOVINGDON.

"A gleaming presence" is the term applied to something seen to run along wall in Box Lane, Bovingdon.

CHESHUNT.

House in Theobalds Park reputed to be haunted by various ghosts.

Grey Lady seen at "The Great House," bloodstains visible in upper room.

GRAVELEY.

The Evil One throwing shovelfuls of earth from Whomerly Wood, which form "The Six Hills" at Stevenage, threw a seventh, which, misdirected, knocked the steeple off Graveley church.

HATFIELD.

Coach and horses drive up to Hatfield House, through main door, up the staircase and disappear.

Veiled woman appeared to Elizabeth Freeman at Hatfield and gave her message for Charles II.

HERTFORD.

Member of Dunster family who committed suicide in Jenningsbury Farm pond, seen periodically.

KING'S LANGLEY.

Monks seen in Priory orchard, apparently seeking for buried treasure.

KNEBWORTH.

Apparition seen at Knebworth House, premonitory of death in the family.

PIRTON.

Apparition of headless Royalist, beheaded at High Down, seen there on anniversary of death.

THE FOLK-LORE OF HERTFORDSHIRE.

RIDGE.

Ghost of Sir Henry Blount said to appear in his study at Tyttenhanger.

ST. ALBANS.

Apparition of Mother Haggy appeared in 1712.

SARRATT.

Apparition of headless person seen in house at Sarratt.

SAWBRIDGEWORTH.

Horseman, supposed to be Sir John Jocelyn, seen riding down avenue at Hyde Hall, Sawbridgeworth.

STEVENAGE.

Huge black dog seen near "The Six Hills" and Whomerly Wood, also in avenue leading to church.

TEWIN.

Ghost of Lady Cathcart seen in room at Tewin Water.
Apparition of Lady Sabine appeared to General Sabine at Tewin House at the time of her decease.

TRING.

Black dog, the disembodied spirit of Colley who murdered the Osbornes at Tring and was gibbeted, seen on site of gibbet.

WARE.

Ghost of Jonas Fosbrooke, maker of the "Great Bed of Ware," said to appear to anyone who dared to sleep thereon.

WATFORD.

Lord Capel's ghost said to appear at Cassiobury on the anniversary of his decollation.

LEGENDS AND TRADITIONS.

ALDEBURY.

Sir Guy de Gravade, a dabbler in the Evil Art, vanishes with house and servant, reappears on anniversary of the event.

ANSTEY.

A fiddler volunteers to explore the subterranean passage from Cave Gate to Anstey Castle and is lost therein.

ALDENHAM.

Trees growing from tomb held to be indicative that the person commemorated was a sceptic.

THE FOLK-LORE OF HERTFORDSHIRE.

AYOT ST. LAWRENCE.

Hat of Henry VIII. and shoes of Anne Boleyn supposed to have been given as a token of the gift of the manor.

BERKHAMSTED, GREAT.

Chest of gold buried in Rose's Hole, Frithsden, was partly raised but lost by the finders who spoke and broke the charm.

BOVINGDON.

Part of churchyard supposed to have been desecrated by bloodshed, persons buried therein cannot rest.

BYGRAVE.

Pedlar murdered and beheaded at Bygrave House, "walked" in the neighbourhood.

Lady and child, buried beneath drawing floor of Bygrave House, also "walked."

CHESHUNT, WALTHAM CROSS.

Story of Queen Eleanor's devotedness and its sequel as told by a Bramfield farmer to his friend.

FLAMSTEAD.

The "Wicked Lady Ferrers" who turned highway robber upon occasion and was killed, reappeared in connection with several fires at Markyate Cell.

HERTINGFORDBURY.

Tomb in the churchyard, said to be Nell Gwyn's, actually that of Elizabeth Cullen, mistress of first Lord Cowper.

KING'S LANGLEY.

For jeering at Richard III. the women of Chipperfield were deprived of dower when the husband died intestate.

KNEBWORTH.

Jenny Spinner, a story founded upon the belief that a girl with a spinning wheel haunted Knebworth House.

LILLEY.

John Kellerman "the Last of the Alchemists" reputed to have had the aid of the Devil in his experiments.

HODDESDON.

Apparition said to have been seen at "Stanborough."

THE FOLK-LORE OF HERTFORDSHIRE.

PELHAM, BRENT.

Piers Shonks, who slew the Pelham Dragon and being threatened by the Evil One, desired to be buried in the wall of the church where his tomb is to be seen.

REDBOURN.

When the Womerc brook overflows, famine or other calamity ensues.

A Romish convert staying at Redbourn had visions of the Devil in the shape of a lion.

RICKMANSWORTH.

Trees at Moor Park are said to have been decapitated in memory of the unfortunate Duke of Monmouth.

ST. ALBANS.

The Devil was discovered in a cellar in the shape of a ram and was killed and eaten.

Sir Ralph de Rayne was murdered while on his way to his wedding. His wraith appeared to his bride Lilian Grey, who swooned and died.

SANDON.

Lad overhears robbers plan to rob mansion at Woodley Yards and gives information to the owner. He is afterwards captured by the gang and flayed alive.

The Lord of the Manor residing at Hankins is warned by a dream of the destruction of his house and family. This, finding to be true, causes him to commit suicide.

SAWBRIDGEWORTH.

Two sisters of evil life, residing at Manor House in Says Gardens were swallowed up, together with the house.

STANSTEAD ABBOTS.

Site of church said to have been removed from village to present position by supernatural agency.

STEVENAGE.

"The Six Hills" are reputed to have been constructed by diabolic agency, the hills representing shovelfuls of earth thrown there by the Evil One. Holes in Whomerly Wood held to be source whence earth was obtained.

TWIN.

Trees growing from tomb held to be indicative that the person commemorated was a sceptic.

THE FOLK-LORE OF HERTFORDSHIRE.

WALKERN.

Site of church said to have been removed from Box, in Stevenage parish, to Walkern, by supernatural agency.

WATFORD.

Fig-tree growing out of a tomb held to be indicative that the person commemorated was a sceptic.

WESTON.

Jack O'Legs, a giant and highway robber, but benefactor to the poor, was finally captured, killed and buried in the churchyard where his grave is still shown.

WYMONDLEY, LITTLE.

Disinherited Prior said to roam the Monks Walk at Wymondley Priory.

The celebrated Chestnut Tree is said to have been planted by Julius Cæsar to mark the extent of his conquest.

NO PLACE SPECIFIED.

A Hertfordshire farmer, disputing with a mower, says that the Devil may reap his crop, which accordingly happens.

SAYINGS.

CUCKOO—"IN APRIL COME HE WILL," ETC.

Refers to duration of cuckoo's visit.

"DIRTY TRING."

Part of town lying in a vale, the roads in wet weather were miry.

"HERTFORDSHIRE AIR."

Reputed to be healthy and invigorating.

"HERTFORDSHIRE CLUBS AND CLOUTED SHOON," ETC.

An expression, referring to the early rising of the labourers.

"HERTFORDSHIRE HEDGEHOGS."

Natives so-called because they are reputed to be bad neighbours.

"HERTFORDSHIRE KINDNESS."

Said to refer to the custom of returning hospitality directly afterwards.

"HERTFORDSHIRE THICK HEADS."

They say of the Hertfordshire people that if a man fall he'll come to no harm as long as he falls on his head.

THE FOLK-LORE OF HERTFORDSHIRE.

"IN JULY, SOME REAP RYE," ETC.

Refers to early harvesting.

"NO HEART CAN THINK, NO TONGUE CAN TELL," ETC.

Has reference to buried treasure near Elstree.

"SIDE POCKET FOR A TOAD."

Alluding to the uselessness of anything.

THE BAILY OF ROYSTON.

A personage of some importance, but it probably alludes to Royston in Yorkshire.

"A ROYSTON HORSE AND A CAMBRIDGE MASTER OF ARTS," ETC.

A covert allusion to the arrogance of an M.A.

"TRING, WING AND IIVINGHOE, THREE CHURCHES ALL IN A ROW."

Explanation unnecessary.

"TRING, WING AND IIVINGHOE, THREE DIRTY VILLAGES ALL IN A ROW," ETC.

See remarks on "Dirty Tring."

"TRING, WING AND IIVINGHOE, HAMPDEN OF HAMPDEN DID FOREGO," ETC.

Hampden said to have lost these manors as a result of striking the Black Prince.

"WARE AND WADESMILL, WORTH HALF LONDON."

It is supposed that the rise of the malting industry brought prosperity to these places, hence the saying.

"WHEN VERULAM STOOD," ETC.

Alludes to the decay of Verulam and rise of St. Albans.

"WHERE D'YE THINK, CHIPPERFIELD"?

A cryptic allusion to this remote village, possibly connected with the success or failure of the cherry crop.

"WICKED WIGGINTON."

The village obtained its sobriquet from the venial crime of poaching.

"FRAXINUS IN CLIVO," ETC.

Refers to the ash, which thrives on the high ground at Ashridge Park.

THE FOLK-LORE OF
HERTFORDSHIRE.

WITCHCRAFT AND POSSESSION.

BALDOCK.

Two witches (names unknown) were ducked.

BROXBOURNE.

Frances Baily, accused of witchcraft.

BUSHEY.

Joan White, accused of witchcraft.

CHESHUNT.

Israel Amyce, said to be bewitched.

FLAMSTEAD.

Thomas Burridge, of Markyate, "possessed."

GADDESDEN, GREAT.

Young woman, name unknown, "possessed."

GADDESDEN, LITTLE.

Mary Hall, said to be "possessed."

HADHAM, LITTLE.

Alice Free, accused of witchcraft.

HITCHIN.

Elizabeth Day, said to be "possessed."

ICKLEFORD.

Thomas Harding, said to be a wizard.

NORTON.

John Palmer, said to be a wizard. Elizabeth Knott, accused of witchcraft.

ROYSTON.

Joan Harrison and her daughter executed for practising witchcraft.

ST. ALBANS.

A witch (name unknown) ducked.

"Mary-by-chance," a witch ducked.

SARRATT.

John Baldwin's children said to be "possessed."

STANDON.

Joan Mills, accused of witchcraft.

TRING.

Joan and Ruth Osborne, accused of witchcraft, were murdered.

Isaac Tockfield, said to be "possessed."

WALKERN.

Jane Wenham, accused of witchcraft.

WARE.

Jane Stretton, said to be bewitched.

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G

Gerish, W. B.
~ A Hertfordshire witch.

DATE

NAME OF BORROWER

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